

September 29, 2011

South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs

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ZIMMERMAN NAMED STATE'S FIRST SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Gov. Dennis Daugaard has named Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Larry Zimmerman of Rapid City as the state's first Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Zimmerman is currently the state command sergeant major in the South Dakota Army National Guard, the Guard's highest-ranking noncommissioned officer. In that role, he is the Adjutant General's personal advisor on all enlisted matters, and acts as a representative and advocate for more than 3,400 soldiers in South Dakota.

CSM Zimmerman's commitment to the Army National Guard ends Feb. 1, 2013, and he will assume his role as Secretary of Veterans Affairs at that time.

Until Zimmerman assumes his position in 2013, Lt. Gov. Matt Michels will serve as interim Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Michels is a veteran of the United States Navy, and is already the Governor's point-person on veterans' issues. The lieutenant governor is a member of the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Retired COL Steve Harding will continue to serve as deputy secretary for the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of the Military.

Zimmerman completed a tour in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom, as the Operations Sergeant Major for the nine Northern provinces in that country and served many months of that tour as the Forward Operating Base Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge from 2008 to 2009. He was awarded a Bronze Star for that tour. Before that he was CSM at the 109th Engineer Battalion at Sturgis, CSM of the 109th Regional Support Group in Rapid City and the Regional Training Institute Commandant at Fort Meade. He served in the Active Army from March 1973 to October 1976 and is a Vietnam Era Veteran. He is a lifetime member of the VFW.



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VETERANS HONOR MARCH

The South Dakota National Guard's Enlisted Association hosted its 8th annual Black Hills Veterans Honor March on Saturday, Sept. 24, in the Northern Black Hills. More than 180 marchers participated in this year's 26.2 mile march, which pays tribute to the many sacrifices made by this nation's veterans.

"Our goal here is to honor our veterans in South Dakota, as well as march in memory of all the Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines throughout the years that have scarified so much for us," said Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Lamp, Honor March coordinator. Many of this year's marchers included members of the South Dakota Army and Air National Guard.

"We hold our veterans high and we know how important they are to us and the freedoms that we have," said Army Guard Staff Sgt. Sam Schaefer's, Headquarters and Headquarters Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion of Watertown. "It's important to host events like this where people can come out and show their patronage and support for the veterans."

Many participants not only ran for veterans of past wars, but also current ones. "I'm running for those that have been deployed and who are currently deployed," said Army Guard Master Sgt. Todd Grabow, Joint Force Headquarters of Rapid City. "What they are doing is a lot harder than what we did today, and it's the least we can do to show our support."

The Honor March, which is a marathon's length, was open to all military service members and the civilian public, but you didn't have to be a marathon runner to participate. There was also a half marathon that marchers could partake in. Participants competed as individuals or in five-member teams and completed the course by walking, running or marching.

Camaraderie is not only felt among team members, but between military services. "It great to see the Army and Air Guard come together for this event," said Oxender. "The camaraderie, the unit cohesion is built that much bigger within our organization and throughout the state."

While the Honor March is held primarily to pay tribute to our nation's veterans, funds raised from the event go on to support veterans in other ways.



FALL MINI CONFERENCES

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs has scheduled the fall mini-conferences for October 25 – October 27, 2011.

Staff from the Pension Maintenance Center will be conducting training and updates on veterans and widows pension EVR's, application procedures etc. As in the past, the training sessions are scheduled to run from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm at the following locations.

- Oct. 25 Rapid City – VFW, 420 Main Street
- Oct. 26 Pierre - American Legion, 520 So. Pierre Street
- Oct. 27 Brookings – VFW, 520 Main Avenue



SURVIVING, STRIVING AND THRIVING

County Commissioners and Officials were challenged, during their recent conference held in Rapid City Sept. 19-21, to be the "ultimate survivor." Presentations were designed to help them survive, strive and thrive in this ever-changing world. One of their panel presentations focused on the needs of South Dakota's veterans.

Lt. Col. Harvey Fitzgerald and State Command Sgt. Maj. Larry Zimmerman addressed the deployments, troop and family readiness, and readjustments after deployment. Department of Veterans Affairs Deputy Secretary Steve Harding provided an update on the Governor's issuance of Executive Order 2011-01 creating two new departments – the South Dakota Department of the Military and the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. He also provided an update on the status of veterans homes in South Dakota.

Deb Dodson with the VA provided an overview of the programs the VA provides for OND/OEF/OIF veterans. Also participating in the panel were Mike Ortnier, Fall River County Commissioner and Don Hol-loway, Pennington County Sheriff.



CLAUSSEN SELECTED MIDWEST REGION VICE PRESIDENT

Charles Claussen, Director for the Division of Veterans Affairs, has been selected as the Midwest Region Vice President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs. Claussen was selected by his peers during their annual conference in Lincoln City, OR Sept. 21-26.

The National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs (NASDVA) is an organization with a history dating back to 1946. In the aftermath of World War II many veterans earned State and Federal benefits which required coordinated efforts to assure that veterans received these entitlements. Thus, States developed a Department or Agency designated as the "Office of Prime Responsibility" for veteran services and programs. The members of NASDVA are the Chief Executive Officers or State Directors of Veterans' Affairs in each State as well as the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

It is important to note that collectively state governments commit more than \$4 billion annually of their own resources to support of our nation's veterans and their families. States are second only to the federal VA in providing benefits and services to the men and women who defend our nation. Although each state is unique, with its own traditions, programs, and resources, they are united by a common goal to make a difference in the lives of our veterans.



National Association of State Directors of Veteran's Affairs

STATEWIDE HOMELESS COUNT



The South Dakota statewide homeless count took place Tuesday night. The state coordinator, Lisa Bondy, says this year's goal was to reach the more rural areas of the state. In Rapid City, volunteers took to the streets, alleys, and parks to count people who are homeless. The Black Hills Homeless Coalition coordinated the Rapid City area homeless count, and organizers say homelessness can be defined in a variety of ways. Andrea Denke, of the Black Hills Regional Homeless Coalition, said, "There are folks that live in storage units, emergency shelters transitional housing, they live in motels. Anything

that is not permanent housing we would deem them as homeless." The 2010 count found 1,728 homeless individuals; 459 women, 809 men and 446 children.

Steve Oliva and Kevin Bowen, field officers for the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, and Charles Quinn, Hughes County VSO, participated in Pierre's Project Connect.



UNACCOMPANIED VETERANS MEMORIAL SERVICE



BLACK HILLS NATIONAL CEMETERY

UNACCOMPANIED VETERANS MEMORIAL SERVICE

OCTOBER 3, 2011 9:00 AM

**JOIN US FOR A MILITARY COMMITTAL FOR VETERANS
INTERRED WITHOUT HONORS BETWEEN JULY 2011 AND
SEPTEMBER 2011**

HONORS TO BE PROVIDED BY: S.D. NATIONAL GUARD



ST JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH RECOGNIZED

The Department of Defense presented St. John's Lutheran Church of Yankton, S.D., the 2011 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, Sept. 22, 2011 at the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, D.C.

The Freedom Award is the highest recognition given by the U.S. government to employers for their outstanding support of employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve.

The award was presented to St. John's, along with 14 other recipients, at a ceremony attended by members of Congress, senior military officials and business and industry leaders.

Prior to the ceremony, Mr. John Marquardt, St. John's Lutheran Church congregational president, and the other Freedom Award recipients met with Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta who thanked him for superior support of our nation's citizen warriors.

South Dakota Army National Guard Chaplain Lt. Col. David Gunderson, who's also the senior pastor at St. John's, said he nominated his church for the Freedom Award because of the "generous support" received when he was deployed to Afghanistan. "Many churches send care packages, but St. John's Lutheran Church wrapped me up and sent me as the care package," Gunderson said.

St. John's supported its pastor, even though churches are reportedly exempt from the federal law that protects servicemembers' jobs. Gunderson offered to resign before deploying, but St. John's refused, and instead offered to continue his pay and benefits, he said. When Gunderson declined the pay, St. John's used it to support his military mission in Afghanistan.

Upon arrival in Afghanistan, Gunderson's chapel only had ten hymnals, which was not enough for those who were attending the service. The hymnals happened to be the same hymnals used by St. John's. Gunderson shared the need with the church and they immediately responded by sending two-dozen hymnals to Afghanistan.

Gunderson also soon realized they didn't have the materials to deal with grief. There was an immediate need for grief counseling items and ordering through the Army system can sometimes take some time. Again, he shared the need with the church that sent over several grief counseling books and in two weeks they were gone. Within another 10-14 days, the church had responded to yet another call and sent over more counseling materials.

Back in Yankton, St. John's established a place for family grief counseling when a local deployed unit experienced a series of losses. The congregation supported Gunderson's wife, he said, by mowing the lawn, repairing the heating system and bringing over food. Because of the congregation's support for "Pastor Dave," Gunderson said he was able to focus on his mission in Kabul, knowing his family was well taken care of at home.

"St. John's truly deserves this award," said Gunderson. "And it's because of these various reasons that I join St. Paul in his words to the Philippians where he says, 'I thank the Lord for your partnership with me and the ministry of the Gospel.'"



(Portions of this story from Terri Moon Cronk, American Forces Press Service)



UPCOMING EVENTS

October 13—Stand Down—Rapid City

October 14—Women's Veterans Conference—Holiday Inn City Centre—Sioux Falls

October 14-16—VABHHCS Women's Retreat

November 11—Grand Opening of Women of War Center

November 11—Veterans Day

December 10—National Wreaths Across America Remembrance



Whitewood students raise their flags high as they salute and thank their heroes — the 842nd!

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